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The **P**ALIMPSEST

DECEMBER 1921

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

VOL. II

ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1921

NO. 12

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A Race Riot on the Mississippi

It was early in the morning of the 29th of July, 1869, when the Northern Line steamer "Dubuque" swung slowly away from the wharf at Davenport and with many puffs and snorts from the remonstrating engine, began to push her way northward against the current. The shouting of orders, the creaking of the boat's machinery, and the bumping of the boxes and barrels of freight as they were moved about were in marked contrast to the quiet of the river slipping interminably on its way to the ocean, and the peaceful shores dotted here and there with farm houses.

In her cabins on the upper deck the vessel carried about one hundred passengers, and on the deck below where the freight was piled high were twice as many steerage or deck passengers, who shared with some horses, also bound northward, the discomforts of the open deck. These men, rough in dress and fluent in profanity, included many lumbermen who

had floated huge rafts of logs down the river and were now returning to the harvest fields and logging camps of the north. The steamer was commanded by Captain John B. Rhodes who had under him a crew consisting of a few white officers and about thirty deck hands, most of whom were colored.

A little after eight o'clock, just as the cabin passengers were finishing breakfast, the second clerk, Theodore Jones by name, went to the lower deck to collect fares and examine tickets. This was no easy task for the space was crowded; and the officer stationed a negro deck hand named Moses Davis at the stairway with orders to permit no one to ascend while the fares were being collected.

Apparently this was a mistake in judgment on the part of the clerk, for the raftsmen, accustomed to submit to harsh and even brutal treatment from their white bosses, had only contempt for a colored man. It was not long before an Irish lumberman known as "pock-marked" or "Mike" Lynch, who had been drinking and was in a quarrelsome mood, attempted to pass the guard — probably to secure more liquor at the bar above. An altercation followed which was interrupted temporarily by the mate, John F. Sweet. Lynch withdrew but gathered about him some twenty-five of his associates and began to threaten the negro. It was suggested that Lynch and Davis fight it out and a ring was formed, but the Irishman refused to fight a negro on these terms and instead led a rush at Davis.

This was the signal for pandemonium. Other raftsmen joined in the assault which was extended to all the colored employees on the boat. By this time the steamer had reached Hagy's Landing at Hampton, Illinois, and some of the rioters, running to the shore, armed themselves with pieces of coal, rocks, and billets of wood with which they bombarded the luckless colored men. Others, led by Lynch, began a search for the colored deck hands who made frantic efforts to find places of concealment. Some sixteen of them escaped to the shore followed by scattering revolver shots and missiles of various kinds. Others were not so fortunate. In the mêlée, Davis escaped from the mob and secreted himself under a lifeboat on the hurricane deck. Two other colored hands, beaten and cut by their assailants, hurried to the stern and in despair leaped into the river, where they sank immediately leaving the water colored with their blood.

A third victim, likewise cut and beaten until partly unconscious, was then seized by half a dozen men and thrown into the river where he, too, disappeared. A fellow sufferer, pursued by the blood crazed mob and frantic with fear jumped from the deck. For a while he struggled in the current but chunks of coal and sticks of wood fell thick and fast about him and he was soon engulfed by the stream, while the rioters shouted in exultation.

After these four murders, the mob made a hunt for more "niggers", searching the main deck, the

guards of the cabins, and the hurricane deck. At last Lynch spied Davis and with an oath pointed out his hiding place to the other rioters. The negro sprang up knife in hand, and ran toward the stairs slashing one of his pursuers as he went but not inflicting a fatal wound. He too was forced to jump into the river. Two men in a skiff started out to rescue him but before they could reach him he had been hit by one of the missiles which were being hurled at him and was drowned. Some days later his body was found in the river at Muscatine and given burial.

While this scene of bloodshed was being enacted on the lower deck, many of the cabin passengers watched the riot from the rail of the deck above, among them being a young woman named Jane Teagarden who many years later wrote a reminiscence of the experience. With her were some children and a number of other women. Fortunately for the colored men, however, many of the cabin passengers were still in their staterooms. One of the negroes, covered with blood from a cut in his throat, ran into the cabin occupied by Rev. and Mrs. D. C. McCoy, exclaiming "Save me, do save me, Missis!" He was kept there and his wounds bandaged while rioters rushed back and forth in the corridor outside hunting for more victims. One fugitive was hidden by a woman passenger in her stateroom and his pursuers were given to understand that he had jumped into the river. Several of the colored men were secreted by the officers in their cabins.

This was apparently all the officers of the "Dubuque" could do, for none of them, strange to say, were armed. In twenty minutes there was not a colored deck hand to be seen anywhere. In the midst of the riot, the vessel had left Hampton and was now continuing her course up the river, the rioters threatening to burn the boat if the captain made a stop for assistance. It appears, however, that no attempt was made to prevent the passengers from going ashore and these were requested by the officers of the boat to telegraph to Rock Island for aid. Some of the raftsmen even volunteered to act as deck hands and the steamer resumed a semblance of order, though the rioters kept a lookout for any of the colored men left on the vessel.

At Camanche, the ringleader, Lynch, and a man named Butler who had been slightly wounded by Davis in his unsuccessful dash went on shore and failed to return. They escaped just in time. A telegram had reached the Sheriff of Rock Island County and in a short time Deputy Sheriff Payne with a posse of about sixty men started to intercept the boat at Clinton reaching there between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, about fifteen minutes ahead of the "Dubuque". Here the steamer pulled into the shore and threw out a gang plank, for the arrival of the officers was unknown to the rioters. As the boat docked a number of the raftsmen started to follow Lynch's example and leave the vessel but they were met by the Deputy Sheriff backed by a

dozen armed men and compelled to return to the boat. The bluster and defiance of authority which had been growing weaker now disappeared entirely and it was without much difficulty that twenty of the men, pointed out by the boat's officers as implicated in the riot, were put in irons.

Captain Rhodes decided to land the prisoners at Rock Island, and the "Dubuque", upon which there was now the hush of tragedy and the order imposed by armed representatives of the government, was turned southward late in the afternoon, stopping only to pick up some of the deck hands who had fled from the boat at the beginning of the attack.

As the steamer drew up to the landing at Rock Island crowds of curious people were kept back by ropes which had been stretched about a part of the levee. The colored deck hands who had escaped the fury of the mob were formed in two lines inside this space while the posse stood guard with drawn revolvers. Then the chief rioters in irons were marched off the boat and the remaining deck passengers were ordered to pass between the rows of negroes to be identified. Over forty white men were taken to jail to await a preliminary hearing and the crowd dispersed. The colored witnesses were given lodgings in the Court House. Mr. Jones, the clerk whose order had precipitated the riot, and Mr. Sweet, the mate, remained to give evidence and at half-past nine that night the boat again started northward.

The following Friday morning the preliminary

hearing was begun at Rock Island before Police Justice E. C. Cropper. The prisoners were brought in manacled in pairs and guarded by the Deputy Sheriff and fifteen assistants. The survivors of the colored crew, twenty-four in number, were seated inside the bar, fronting the prisoners. A local newspaper gives the following description of the scene:

"The negroes were then called up, one by one, and asked to take a careful survey of the prisoners. They followed instructions to the letter. The objects of their searching gaze were about as uneasy a set of mortals as ever occupied the prisoner's box in Rock Island. As the negro would point to a rioter and spot him, the fellow's breath would be impeded by a thickness in his throat, and his face gave signs of oppressive fear."

As a result of this hearing ten men were held for trial and the rest were freed. Among those held was Timothy or "Ted" Butler also known as William Jones, who had left the "Dubuque" in company with Lynch. Butler had been captured by the Sheriff of Clinton County and turned over to the authorities at Rock Island. The prisoners were indicted for the murder of one of the negro deck hands known as William Armstead or William Armstrong, but their trial was postponed from time to time and the witnesses allowed to leave on their own recognizance.

This gave rise to the suspicion that the authorities did not intend to prosecute the white men for the murder of negroes. "The long and short of the bus-

iness is that the case is virtually approaching an inglorious fizzle", was the comment of the *Rock Island Argus* in October, 1869. "A pile of money has been expended by the county and private individuals, and the whole affair has 'ended like a shepherd's tale'. Justice has been cheated of its prey. . . . It is to be hoped that Lynch will not be caught, and another \$500 saddled on the county."

To this the *Davenport Democrat* replied: "Such surely cannot be the case. When a reckless crowd of rioters will murder negroes, drive them into the river, cut and shoot them down for no other offense than color, whether drunk or sober, they should be made to suffer the full penalty of the law. . . . These men are the terror of river travel, and now let them learn well the lesson of obedience to law, and of respecting the rights of others."

The fact that the crime was caused by race prejudice aggravated by drinking gave the tragedy some political significance in the opinion of a Muscatine editor who published the following comment:

WHISKY and PREJUDICE—These were the incentives to the late terrible affair on the steamer Dubuque, whereby five human lives were sacrificed and the persons and property of hundreds of men, women and children placed in imminent peril by an infuriated mob. . . . For the first of these incentives, whisky, the steamboat company is responsible, at least to the extent to which it permits intoxicating beverages to be dealt out from the bars of its steamers to reckless and irresponsible men. . . .

For the second incentive, prejudice, the leaders of the Democratic party are mainly responsible. They have persistently taught their followers to hate the negro and look upon him as one having "no rights which a white man is bound to respect."

After some delay, however, arrangements were made for the trial of the rioters; but the defendants, evidently fearing the sentiment in the community familiar with the story of their crime, asked for a change of venue. This was granted and the case was transferred to the Circuit Court of Henry County, Illinois. Here nine of the men were put on trial at the June term of court in 1870. As a result of this trial two of the defendants were acquitted and seven were found guilty of manslaughter, receiving sentences of from one to three years in the penitentiary. The case against Timothy Butler for some reason was postponed and finally dropped.

In the meantime Michael Lynch, the chief instigator of the crime, remained at liberty for some months. At the request of the Northern Line Packet Company a reward of \$500 was offered for his arrest but he had apparently disappeared completely. He was finally apprehended in a lumber camp at Clarendon, Arkansas, where he secured work in a saw mill. Reports as to the agency of his capture differ. One story is that he was indentified by a former associate, who, knowing that Lynch was aware that he had another wife still living, feared that the Irish lumberman would make known this fact and desired

to get Lynch out of the way. Another account is that Lynch was identified by a travelling agent who had been on the "Dubuque" during the riot.

The identity of the person who received the \$500 reward is not, however, an essential point in the story. Lynch was arrested and two officers went to Clarendon and returned bringing with them the former rioter. The trip was made by boat, the steamer "Minneapolis" bringing the trio from St. Louis to Rock Island. At various stopping places curious and sometimes hostile crowds tried to get a glimpse of the pock-marked face of the prisoner, but Lynch was kept in a stateroom in irons and the would-be spectators were disappointed.

Lynch was put on trial for the crime of murder in the Circuit Court of Rock Island County in September, 1870, and after a trial lasting six days was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years in the State Penitentiary at Joliet.

And while these men served out their sentences, the steamer "Dubuque" plied up and down the Mississippi. The riot, unusual only because of the number of the victims, was almost forgotten, except when in the evenings the colored deck hands perhaps related to newcomers among them the story of the five men of their race who lost their lives that July morning, or the white officers pointed out to favored passengers the places on the boat from which the hunted negroes jumped into the river which on that occasion served as the executioner for the mob.

RUTH A. GALLAHER

An Indian Ceremony

[Colonel George Davenport was murdered by a band of robbers on July 4, 1845. The following account of a ceremony by the Indians who had known him as a trader and friend for nearly thirty years appeared in the *Davenport Gazette* for July 31, 1845, and presumably was written by the editor, Alfred Sanders.—THE EDITOR]

On last Friday afternoon we were witness to a strange and interesting ceremony performed by the Indians over the remains of Mr. Davenport, who was murdered at his residence on Rock Island on the 4th inst. Upon proceeding to the beautiful spot selected as his last resting place, in the rear of his mansion on Rock Island, we found the War Chief and braves of the band of Fox Indians, then encamped in the vicinity of this place, reclining on the grass around his grave at the head of which was planted a white cedar post some seven or eight feet in height.

The ceremony began by two of the braves rising and walking to the post, upon which with paint they began to inscribe certain characters, while a third brave armed with an emblematic war club, after drinking to the health of the deceased from a cup placed at the base of the post, walked three times around the grave, in an opposite direction to the course of the sun, at each revolution delivering a speech with sundry gestures and emphatic motions in the direction of the north-east. When he had ceased he passed the club to another brave who went

through the same ceremony passing but once around the grave, and so in succession with each one of the braves. This ceremony, doubtless, would appear pantomimic to one unacquainted with the habits or language of the Indians, but after a full interpretation of their proceedings they would be found in character with this traditionary people.

In walking around the grave in a contrary direction to the course of the sun, they wished to convey the idea that the ceremony was an *original* one. In their speeches they informed the Great Spirit that Mr. Davenport was their friend and they wished the Great Spirit to open the door to him and to take charge of him. The enemies whom they had slain they called upon to act in capacity of waiters to Mr. Davenport in the spirit land. They believing that they have unlimited power over the spirits of those whom they have slain in battle. Their gestures towards the north-east were made in allusion to their great enemies, the Sioux, who live in that direction. They recounted their deeds of battle, with the number that they had slain and taken prisoners. Upon the post were painted in hieroglyphics, the number of the enemy that they had slain, those taken prisoners, together with the tribe and station of the brave. For instance, the feats of Wau-co-shaw-she, the Chief, were thus portrayed. Ten headless figures were painted, which signified that he had killed ten men. Four others were then added, one of them smaller than the others, signifying that he had taken

four prisoners, one of whom was a child. A line was then run from one figure to another, terminating in a plume, signifying that all had been accomplished by a chief. A fox was then painted over the plume, which plainly told that the chief was of the Fox tribe of Indians. These characters are so expressive that if an Indian of any tribe whatsoever were to see them, he would at once understand them.

Following the sign of Pau-tau-co-to, who thus proved himself a warrior of high degree, were placed *twenty* headless figures, being the number of the Sioux that *he* had slain.

The ceremony of painting the post was followed by a feast, prepared for the occasion, which by them was certainly deemed the most agreeable part of the proceedings. Meats, vegetables and pies were served up in such profusion that many armsfull of the fragments were carried off—it being a part of the ceremony, which is religiously observed, that all the victuals left upon such an occasion are to be taken to their homes. At a dog feast, which are frequently given by themselves and to which white men are occasionally invited, the guest is either obliged to eat all that is placed before him, or hire some other person to do so, else it is considered a great breach of hospitality.

With the feast terminated the exercises of the afternoon, which were not only interesting but highly instructive to those who witnessed them.

Augustus Caesar Dodge

The interesting article on Governor Kirkwood in the *Year Book of the Old Settlers' Association of Johnson County* for 1921, and Mr. Lathrop's book on the *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, in which Augustus Caesar Dodge is called an aristocrat with no sympathy for the life and interests of the common people, may make it timely to restate the facts about that estimable pioneer. Israel Dodge, a soldier of the Revolution, left Kentucky in 1788 or 1789 and crossed the Mississippi into the Spanish province of the Upper Louisiana, settling near Ste. Genevieve now in the State of Missouri. After the purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte he witnessed at St. Louis in 1804 the unfurling of the American flag as a signal of our sovereignty over the new domain. At Ste. Genevieve, his grandson Augustus C. Dodge, son of Henry Dodge, was born in 1812. The boy had brief and insufficient schooling, a few months in a log school house with windows of oiled paper, using pencils made of leaden bullets hammered to a point, quill pens, and ink made by boiling butternut bark with gun powder. When he was fifteen years old, the family moved to Wisconsin, travelling on the steamboat "Indiana" as far as the Rapids of the River Des Moines and the balance of the way on a keel boat pulled by some forty oarsmen in small boats. Landing near what is now

called Galena, the settlers were found in a panic from hostile acts of the Winnebago Indians. Henry Dodge was requested to take command and organized the settlers for protection. His son, A. C. Dodge, joined this force, in the company of Captain Wm. S. Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton.

After the Indians were subdued Henry Dodge settled in Iowa County, Wisconsin, where father and son worked in the lead mines. From there the son moved to Burlington, Iowa, in 1838. The father became Governor of Wisconsin. The son was elected Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa, serving from 1840 to 1846, and became one of Iowa's first United States Senators, being the first member of that body who was born west of the Mississippi. From the Senate he went as our Minister to Spain. His erect carriage and much of his personal manner were due to association with the Indians, for he knew Black Hawk, Mahaska, Keokuk, Wapello, and Poweshiek, the great Sac and Fox leaders. Born a frontiersman, such he remained with not a trace of aristocracy about him. He was a Democrat in politics and in his sympathies, the favorite of the Iowa pioneers. In the Senate he urged the Homestead Bill, to give the public domain to the settlers, and took leadership in the measures that laid the foundations of the State.

One incident in his senatorial career completely discloses his statesmanship and his philosophy of life. The Southern Senators had provoked a debate

in which they nagged the Northern members. On their side the debate was closed by Brown of Mississippi in a speech full of contempt and ridicule for the Northern people. He said that no gentleman would do himself or others the personal service and manual labor for which the negro was fitted by nature.

Then Senator Dodge took the floor in reply. The *Philadelphia Press* described the scene. His father, Henry Dodge, was present as the Senator from Wisconsin. The *Press* said:

His straight Indian figure, strong features and defiant air gave effect to his tones which rang out like a trumpet call. He said: "I have never permitted myself to believe that there can ever be civil war between the North and South. But today I have heard with mingled astonishment and regret in the speech of the Senator from Mississippi such views of life and its duties that I differ from him as widely as the poles are asunder. If his views are those of his section, civil war is possible. I say on the floor of this Senate, in the presence of my father, the Senator from Wisconsin, who will attest its truth, that I have performed and do perform, all these services denounced as menial. I saw my own wood, I have worked in the mines, and driven teams of horses, oxen and mules, and consider myself as respectable as any senator on this floor."

When sent as Minister to Spain, he immediately acquired complete use of the Spanish language, and years later told me that he found his command of Indian dialects useful in his study of the new tongue. But while absent from the State Iowa had changed

in its politics and population. The pioneers who fellowshipped him were in a minority, and the newer settlers knew him not. Now Kirkwood was not a frontiersman nor a pioneer. Born in Maryland, he was reared in Washington City. He moved to an old settled community in Mansfield, Ohio, and thence to Iowa, where he settled at the close of our pioneer period.

I knew Dodge intimately from my childhood and Kirkwood as well later on in my life, and they were both my friends. The actors in that time long gone by should not be judged nor disparaged now by importing into this age the spirit, the prejudices, and hasty judgments of the partisan politics of the past.

JNO. P. IRISH

Comment by the Editor

WHAT IS A PIONEER?

The sketch of Augustus Caesar Dodge by Mr. Irish, which is printed in this number, raises some interesting questions. Just who is entitled to be called a pioneer? And when did the pioneer period end in Iowa? The answers are not easy, for the terms are relative. According to the dictionary, a pioneer is "one who goes before, as into a wilderness, preparing the way for others". Taken literally, then, only the very first arrivals in a geographic location could be classed as pioneers; but such restrictions never have been adhered to. Rather have we spoken of men and women as pioneers who lived in what we call pioneer conditions — which involves further definition. Log cabins and linsey-woolsey clothes, puncheon floors, broad axes, and gourd dippers — these we think of as the natural background of those who went before, preparing the way for others. But it is hard to draw a line and say: up to this time men were preparing the way, thereafter men were simply followers.

And it can not be said that Iowa shed its pioneer conditions on any certain date. Burlington in 1835 was less of a pioneer town than Iowa City in 1840, or Webster City in 1850, or Sioux City in 1855. The frontier was moving westward and the pioneers,

though they might not class themselves as frontiersmen, were never far from that border line. Dodge was no doubt more distinctly a pioneer than Kirkwood. He was born on the frontier and his various moves always took him to a newer fringe of civilization, while Kirkwood, in 1855, though he came upon other conditions which were to try his mettle, at least found log cabins and the gourd dipper no longer in vogue in Iowa City.

NEWCASTLE

An intimate presentation of pioneer conditions in Iowa is found in the *Reminiscences of Newcastle, Iowa* (Webster City) dictated by Mrs. Sarah Brewer Bonebright, written out by her daughter, Mrs. Harriet B. Closz, and published under the auspices of the Historical Department at Des Moines. The parents of Mrs. Bonebright came to the neighborhood of Webster City in 1848, and were the founders of the town which at first was called Newcastle. Fragments of memories of details of life and bits of local color, difficult things to resurrect in historical work, have been pieced together into a book that is illuminative of the daily existence of the pioneers — their clothes and their food and habits of eating, their homes and furniture and the tools with which they were made, their work and their entertainments. Material of this kind can not but be useful in the understanding and interpretation of pioneer life.

J. C. P.

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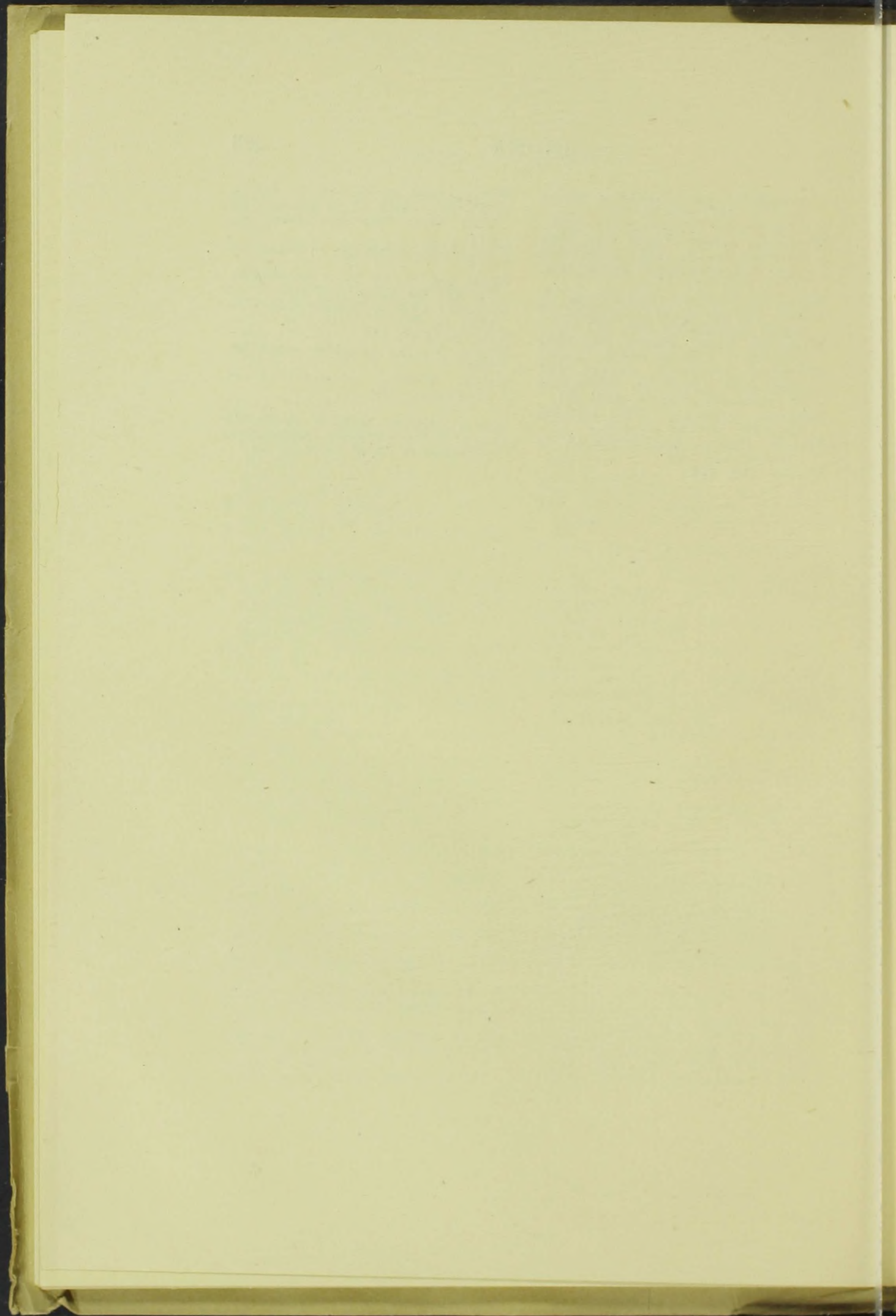
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